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ABSTRACT

Through efforts of concerned, knowledgeable, and culturally aware individuals, recreational programs which may help the special needs of Native Americans can be designed and implemented. Knowledge of tribal similarities and differences, cultural values, diverse life-styles, tribal beliefs, socioeconomic status, and leisure pursuits is paramount in planning programs for tribal groups and individuals. Historically, Native Americans pursued a variety of leisure/recreational activities: dance, group singing, society initiations, storytelling, arts and crafts, drama and games. To be relevant, recreation programs should include activities which promote communication of ideas, self-confidence, self-esteem, artistic and skills development, and allow participants the luxury of obtaining a healthier, happier life. Native Americans should have a voice in designing programs created for their consumption. Local artists, coaches, teachers, and tribal leaders can be identified and enlisted to assist in establishing viable programs. To establish programs which mirror community needs, personal interviews should be conducted and community demographics (age, sex, handicaps, interests, skills) analyzed. Logistical and support services (transportation, availability of experts, cooperation and coordination, public relations, leadership, and facilities) must be available. Special events (community wide celebrations, special local programs, field trips) can be a successful means of impressing the value of recreational programs on the public. (NEC)

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GRASSROOTS INVOLVEMENT IN RECREATION
FOR NATIVE AMERICANS

By

Dr. Nancy L. Carleton, Dr. E. A. Scholer, Neal Townsend

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Recreation Programming, according to Kraus, may be defined as the process of providing opportunities for recreational participation to the public, selected clientele or target audiences. Native Americans are representative of the latter two instances. Organized recreation may program varied types of activities such as sports, aquatics, drama, arts and crafts, and social events which meet the needs of participants in their leisure. Recreation activities are not the end products but rather the people served are the focal point of such organized programs.

A basic tenet of recreation programming is that programmers must take into account the needs, interests, and desires of the individual. The public, unfortunately, cannot be considered a homogeneous entity in regard to programming. Individual and group differences must be particularly understood and provided for in order that the activity or activities serve the community or selected clientele. Programming for Native Americans is complicated by diverse life-styles, tribal beliefs, socio-economic status and leisure pursuits of the various tribes. A knowledge of the similarities and differences of the tribes and their cultural values is paramount in planning programs for tribal groups as well as individuals.

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Many of the present and historical leisure pursuits of Native Americans reflect tribal or traditional cultural values. Relative, rather than absolute, differences are apparent in a comparison of behavior patterns among and between Native American cultures as well as others. These differences are of vital importance in planning for the leisure activities of the Native American.

Historically, the Native Americans pursued a variety of leisure and recreational activities. Such activities usually included dances, group singing, society initiations, storytelling, arts and crafts, drama and games. Some of these elements remain today as an important part of the Native American culture.

A recreation program having relevant value must be more than mere busywork and pure entertainment. It should include activities which promote the communication of ideas, self-confidence, self-esteem, artistic and skills development, and allow its participants the luxury of obtaining a healthier, happier life.

Native Americans who participate in any recreation program should be involved by having a voice in designing the programs created for their consumption. The challenge is for Native Americans to make programs a success by insisting that their best interest be served. To this end assistance should be sought from any and all available resources at the local, state and federal levels.

Although the development of cultural content in programming should be addressed, most recreation agencies, churches and other well-meaning organizations still offer "packages" of pre-planned recreational activities which are based almost entirely on established Anglo cultural values and concepts. It appears only

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logical to assume that this approach is doomed to failure for NOT considering the cultural and social values of the Native American which impacts on their recreational interest and pursuits.

Persons in the tribe or local community with leadership qualities and the willingness to assist in establishing a viable program must be identified. Local artists, coaches, teachers, tribal leaders or others possessing recreational, managerial or organizational skills should be in all planning discussions. Personnel from recreational programs already in place, professionals from vocational schools or nearby colleges, local businessmen and personnel, community leaders and any interested citizen are also important sources of assistance. Such a diverse approach will insure that the DESIRES of the Native American community will be included in establishing or developing a viable program.

A person or committee with the skills necessary to keep activities interesting and functioning should assume responsibility for implementing the various facets of the program. It would be advantageous for a Native American or a committee possessing these attributes to assume this role since they know the culture and community intimately.

To establish a program which mirrors the needs of the community, personal interviews of the community are often effective. A list of possible activities, in order to trigger responses, should be presented. If some sense of organization is not included, one may be swamped with so many different suggestions that the survey becomes meaningless in later planning. Results should be recorded to indicate opinions and desires and then these may be incorporated in the planning process.

In order to implement a viable recreation program, adequate facilities must be available. Existing facilities, school rooms, empty warehouses, storefronts, community centers, churches and even private homes may be considered as potential sites for the conduct of programs. All of these must be identified and contracts rendered for extended use.

Specific issues related to the demographics of the community such as age, sex, handicaps (physical or mental), areas of interest, developmental and/or skills levels should be analyzed in order to assure opportunities for all participants.

Additional logistical and support services to consider when implementing a program would include the following:

(1) transportation

It is essential that transportation be arranged to ensure participation by all.

(2) availability of experts

The establishment of a pool of individuals possessing specialized skills for activity planning and implementation of activities is of utmost importance.

(3) cooperation and coordination

Cooperation and coordination between community and commercial concerns should be sought as a means of providing a broader base for program implementation.

(4) public relations

The promotion of a recreation program by all possible means is necessary to establish interest, increase involvement and to educate the public.

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(5) leadership

As previously stated, the initial and continued involvement of the tribal council and key personnel ensures continuity and stability.

(6) facilities

Again basic to any recreation program is the identification and procurement of facilities in which to conduct activities.

In addition to those activities which are common to most recreation programs (music, drama, dance, sports, arts and crafts, etc.), special events serve the important purpose of giving a program sparkle and aiding in maintaining interest. Special events are perhaps the single most powerful means recreation programmers have to impress the public regarding the value of the program. The concept of special event programming allows the leadership to plan for a number of experiences that defy usual classification.

The three most common types of special events are:

- (1) community wide events and celebrations including such activities as feast days, pow-wows, rodeos, sports tournaments, etc.
- (2) special local programs such as fairs/carnivals, school tournaments, rug auctions, etc.
- (3) field trips directly related to activities within the program such as visit a historical/culture area.

Above all, in planning recreation programs for Native Americans it is imperative to know the public served. The information

presented here may serve as a starting point in organizing positive and meaningful recreation programs for Native Americans. Through the efforts of concerned, knowledgeable and culturally aware individuals, it is possible to design and implement programs which may help meet the special needs of Native Americans.

The references cited are excellent resources for planning, developing and organizing meaningful recreation programs.

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